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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000527

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [TU](#)  
SUBJECT: TURKEY: ISRAEL AND JEWISH COMMUNITY GOING PUBLIC

REF: ISTANBUL 387

Classified By: Consul General Sharon A. Wiener  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11.](#) (C) Summary: A September poll reveals that most Turks have significantly negative perspectives of Israel and the United States. Since 2003, this negativity has also translated into a negative impression of the Turkish Jewish population. To combat these impressions, the Israeli Consulate in Istanbul and the governing board of the Jewish Community in Turkey are propagating positive images of both Israel and the Jewish community through separate public relations campaigns focused on the two countries' trade relations and on Turkey's Jewish heritage. End Summary.

[12.](#) (U) A September poll by Transatlantic Trends, a project of the German Marshall Fund, surveying Turkish feelings toward other states and international organizations, found Turks to be warmest toward Palestinians (towards whom 44 percent of the population has a positive perception), the EU (33 percent), and Iran (32 percent), and coldest toward Russia (18 percent), the US (14 percent), and Israel (8 percent). The Turks had a 6 point cooler self-regard than in 2007, with an 80 percent approval rating. According to the Jewish Community of Turkey, since 2003 many Turks view Israel and Turkey's Jewish population with similar degrees of coolness and distance (Ref).

[13.](#) (SBU) Israel's Economic and Trade Consul Doron Abrahami wants to hire a professional public relations firm to boost Israel's image in Turkey. According to Abrahami, his business and government contacts in Turkey tell him that Israel's image is inextricably tied to the U.S. He thus suggests that the U.S. and Israel combine efforts to improve their similarly dismal images. In order to improve Israel's image in Turkey, Abrahami requested and received a special budget to promote public awareness of the high volume of trade and degree of economic cooperation between Israel and Turkey. On 27 November the Israeli Consulate will award trade certificates to select Turkish businesses for successful ventures involving Israel.

[14.](#) (SBU) According to Jewish Community VPs Sami Herman and Lina Filiba, Turkish Jews consider themselves Turkish, and do not consider themselves members of a "minority." Nevertheless, Yael Saranga, a Turkish Jew working at the Israeli Consulate, and Filiba say that the Turkish population at large and prominent politicians insist on considering Turkish Jews as "foreigners" and often consider them Israeli instead of Turkish. As an example, Filiba noted that during a September luncheon Prime Minister Erdogan congratulated Jewish Community President Silvio Olvadyo on having elected Livni as Prime Minister in Israel.

[15.](#) (U) Like the Israeli Mission, the Jewish Community of

Turkey is also strategizing new approaches to improving the image of Jews. In an example of unparalleled cooperation, the Jewish Community of Turkey, working with the Turkish Ministries of Culture and Tourism and Foreign Affairs, are sponsoring an October photo exhibit featuring the historic synagogues of Turkey. Filiba said the exhibit is part of a long-planned program to bring Turkey's Jewish heritage to a place of prominence through regular programs and exhibits. By pulling the Jewish community from the shadows through such public affairs programming, Filiba explained, the community hopes to become an accepted and familiar part of the average Turk's life and concept of nationality. Speaking at the exhibit, Herman and AKP Party Vice Chairman for Foreign Affairs and Istanbul MP Egemen Bagis both emphasized the cultural and historical wealth that different ethnicities bring to the single nation of Turkey.

¶6. (SBU) Filiba and members of the governing board of the Jewish Community agree that they should "open up and expose themselves" to the Turkish population, "offering familiarity rather than intrigue and suspicion." While they do worry what newspapers like religious "Vakit" will write, Filiba explained that they view education to be the only solution. Toward that end, the Community has submitted a proposal to the European Union Commission for Human Rights for funding a year of Jewish cultural programming in Turkey that includes a 10,000 euro line item for before and after polling. Filiba has received news that the proposal will be accepted in mid-October and is currently discussing polling options with Koc University's Professor of Sociology Fatos Gokcen.

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¶7. (C) Filiba said that she envisions this programming as one step forward in the Jewish Community's quest for a legal personality from the GOT (Ref). She posits that, with a legal personality, the board of governance would gain more respect from its own community. Filiba also says that GOT views Turkey's Jewish community more favorably than its other minority religious populations. She suggests that because most of the Jewish population was welcomed to Turkey by the Sultan in the 15th Century, and later by the Turkish government in the 20th Century, they continue to maintain a very close relationship with the government. Filiba considers the Community as fortunate in many ways, however she notes that "While other minorities want greater rights" (i.e. to be able to build a place of worship), "we receive these opportunities, but behind closed doors and not through legal and accountable channels."

¶8. (SBU) Comment: Instead of hiding, the Jewish community is choosing to propagate positive images of Turkey's Jewish heritage in very prominent places in Istanbul. The Jewish Community continues to enjoy a positive relationship with the Turkish government at all levels. While Turkish ultra-nationalists are not likely to delink Israel, the United States, and the Turkish Jewish community because of these efforts, younger Turks may begin to consider the Jewish Turkish population as part of their nation. End Comment.

WIENER